

NASA: Space station evacuation not likely

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NASA officials said there's only an "extremely remote chance" the International Space Station might be evacuated because of ongoing computer problems.

Bill Gerstenmaier, NASA associate administrator for space operations, said Thursday afternoon that engineers were unsure what caused the problems that started late Wednesday in Russian computers controlling the space station's secondary thrusters.

"I would say there's an extremely remote chance the problem would lead to abandoning the space station," said Gerstenmaier, noting the most critical issue is maintaining the station's attitude. But he said there's enough redundancy built into the station to allow alternate means of control.

However, Gerstenmaier said any long-term loss of attitude control might force the ISS crew into the docked space shuttle or Progress cargo ship because it would mean the station's solar panels couldn't remain aligned with the sun.

He declined to call the problem critical. "In my world this is (normal) space station operations," he said, noting the ISS is a complex operation and the problems might not be quickly resolved.

NASA issued contingency plans Thursday that could extend the shuttle's stay at the ISS to help maintain the space station's attitude.

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